



June 25, 2024

Statement from the Oregon Library Association, the Oregon Intellectual Freedom Committee and Parents Defending Schools and Libraries

RE: IFC Statement to Midwest Tape regarding proposed Hoopla rating system

This is a joint statement regarding Midwest Tape’s attempts to implement a new rating system, or alternatively called “filter system”, that directly impacts access to children’s collections. This statement comes from the Oregon Library Association (OLA), the Oregon Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) and Parents Defending Schools and Libraries (PDSAL). The Oregon Library Association (OLA) is a professional organization of Oregon library workers and includes the Oregon Intellectual Freedom Committee. The IFC provides expertise and support for intellectual freedom issues on behalf of the Oregon Library Association and is the professional committee with the charges to support intellectual freedom and to respond to censorship. The OLA in combination with IFC supports Oregon school and public libraries in managing challenges to materials within their library collections. PDSAL is an Oregon non-profit organization promoting intellectual freedom and access to information in schools and libraries across the Pacific Northwest.

Over the course of the past several years, libraries across Oregon have received an extraordinarily increased number of both formal and informal complaints regarding the materials within their collections. These complaints are largely due to themes or characters that identify as being LGBTQIA+, while the formal complaint forms use the words ‘inappropriate for minors’ or ‘sexual content’. The newly implemented [Universal Content Rating System](#) from [Midwest Tape for Hoopla](#) is in direct violation of the American Library Association’s [Library Bill of Rights](#) in that this rating system has been subjectively developed to identify the ‘age appropriateness’ of materials, including content based restrictions due to, among other factors, sexual content of the materials.

As stated by the [American Library Association](#):

“Any private group's rating system, regardless of political, doctrinal, or social viewpoint, is subjective and meant to predispose the public's attitude. The use by libraries, therefore, would violate the *Library Bill of Rights*. Libraries should remain viewpoint-neutral, providing information that patrons seek about any rating system equitably, regardless of the group's viewpoint.”

Additionally, this new rating system is in direct contradiction to library collection development philosophies, where the publishers assign the ‘intended audience’ of the materials. Publishers already review the content of the materials in assigning the age intended audience through a variety of objective and qualitative processes. These processes include reviewing the intended audience provided by the author, involving various book reviewers and adding their thoughts and remarks, as well as confirming the intended audience with the publishing legal team (to protect against false advertising concerns) prior to publication. What Midwest Tape is doing is neither necessary nor objectively sound, and goes against collection development philosophies and industry standards. To create a system that allows for a Collection Development Librarian or other library staff member to purposefully not select materials due to a subjective, content based rating system would have a chilling effect on the access to diverse materials for minors.

Lastly, it is the IFC’s understanding that the impetus behind the nationwide challenges is a special-interest political agenda that seeks increased control over the ideas and information available to children, particularly in the library setting. We recognize this effort as part of a nationally-coordinated campaign that threatens the core American values and First Amendment rights of free expression and free access to ideas by muting the voices of historically marginalized groups, just as these communities are finally gaining fair representation in library collections.

Among the many requests of these organizations is to include rating systems on materials for minors. To provide a tool such as this would have a detrimental impact to all of the libraries across this country trying to stand up for the rights of users, in that this system could easily migrate from the Hoopla platform to library print collections. Libraries nationwide are involved with litigation regarding this type of rating system, and to provide a tool that could be easily applied to print collections would set libraries up for the possibility of legal ramifications. For more information regarding rating systems and implications for libraries, please see:

- [Marathon County Library Board retains challenged book, rejects rating system](#)
- [Booksellers, Industry Groups File Suit to Block Texas Book Rating Law](#)
- [The Biased Online Book Ratings Systems Undermining Professional Review Sources: Book Censorship News, November 4, 2022](#)

In sum, the Oregon Intellectual Freedom Committee, Oregon Library Association and Parents Defending Schools and Libraries stand firmly behind our [Library Bill of Rights](#), the [American Library Association's Statement Regarding Midwest Tape/Hoopla Age and Content Rating System](#), and the Freedom to Read statements and against actions which violate the First Amendment rights and dignity of others. The Oregon Library Association and the Intellectual Freedom Committee are officially requesting the removal of the newly created [Universal Content Rating System](#) and to reinvest, as a company, in the protection of the rights of users to read freely without undue interference with subjective content-based selection tools.

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